MEAGHAN MORRIS'S ESSAY is an exemplary instance of contempo-rary cultural studies. It carefully co nsiders the conditions of its own production and reception - reminding us that its author is a shopper hers elf. Thus it is written from a position for which both the "grammar" of shopping centres (the way their elem ents are put together) and their workability are part of everyday life. But it is also written from a feminist, th eoretical position where such practical considerations are not all that matter. Hence, it is not written for "or dinary women" (who, as Morris notes, exist as such only in the social imaginary) as much as for intellectu als, students, academics. This does not mean, however, that it can either condescend to shoppers who ar e not also theorists or assume that its readers are exceptional.

This sense that theory can never either remain within the sites of everyday life or cut itself loose from the m has another aspect. For Morris recognizes that those who design, manage and market shopping centre s are theorists too. Certainly they know a great deal about the women who constitute so much of their cus tom. This cannot be simply dismissed or deplored, for shopping centres are not just useful; they may also be, for Morris, "lovable."

Because so much information about, and theory of, shopping centers circulates; because, finally, they exi st as architectural outcomes of information technologies which track and manage consumption, Morris ca nnot write a piece which limits "shopping in a shopping centre" to individual pleasure and consciousness i n the manner of de Certeau's "walking in the city." Instead she turns to a history of particular shopping-ce ntre sites she knows.

Yet, although Morris does not delocalize shopping in the way de Certeau delocalizes urban walking, certai n questions remain, most obviously: how much

money do you have to have to "love" a shopping centre? Is shopping in a shopping centre the same for a n unemployed as an employed person - assuming that the first have access to them to begin with? These are old, but not tired, questions which the essay certainly does not pre-empt - and they allow us to think a bout the relation between this kind of work on consumption and earlier, more obviously "left," cultural studi es themes.

Further reading: N. Harris 1990; Kowinski 1985; D. Miller 1998; Morris 1988a, 1988b; Nava 1987; William son 1986.

The first thing I want to do is to cite a definition of modernity. It comes not from recent debates in feminist theory or aesthetics or cultural studies, but from a paper called 'Development in the retail scene' given in Perth in 1981 by John Lennen of Myer Shopping Centres. To begin his talk (to a seminar organized by th e Australian Institute of Urban Studies), Lennen told this fable: 'As Adam and Eve were leaving the Garde n of Eden, Adam turned to Eve and said, "Do not be distressed, my dear, we live in times of change."' Aft er quoting Adam, Lennen went on to say, 'Cities live in times of change. We must not be discouraged by c hange, but rather we must learn to manage change.' He meant that the role of shopping centres was cha nging from what it had been in the 1970s, and that retailers left struggling with the consequences (plannin g restrictions, post-boom economic conditions, new forms of competition) should not be discouraged, but should change their practices accordingly.

I want to discuss some issues for feminist criticism that emerge from a study I'm doing of the managemen t of change in certain sites of 'cultural production' involving practices regularly, if by no means exclusively, carried out by women — shopping, driving, the organization of leisure, holiday and/or unemployment acti vities. By 'sites', I mean shopping centres, cars, highways, 'homes' and motels. It's a large project, and thi s essay is a kind of preface to one or two of its problems. The essay has a framing theme, however — the 'Edenic' allegories of consumerism in general, and of shopping centres in particular, that one can find ela borated in a number of different discourses (and cultural 'sites'). It also has an argument, which will take t he form of a rambling response to three questions that I've often been asked by women with whom I've di scussed the project.

One of these is very general: 'what's feminist about it?' I can't answer that in any direct or immediate way, since obviously 'feminism' is not a set of approved concerns and methods, a kind of planning code, again st which one can measure one's own interests and aspirations. To be frank, it's a question that I find almo st unintelligible. While I do understand the polemical, and sometimes theoretical, value of arguing that so mething is not feminist, to demand a definition of positive feminist identity seems to me to require so man y final decisions to be taken, and to assume so much about shared and settled values, that it makes the v ery concept of a 'project' — undecided and unsettled — impossible. So I shall take this question here as a

n invitation to make up answers as I go, and the essay will be the response. (That's a way of saying that f or me, the answer to 'what's feminist about it?' should be 'I don't know yet'.)

The other two questions are more specific, and relate particularly to shopping centres.
The first question is asked almost invariably by women with whom I've discussed the topic of shopping. T hey say: 'Yes, you do semiotics . . . are you looking at how shopping centres are all the same everywhere ? — laid out systematically, everyone can read them?' They don't ask about shopping centres and chang e, or about a semiotics of the management of change.
In fact, my emphasis is rather the opposite. It's true that at one level of analysis (and of our 'practice.' of s hopping centres), layout and design principles ensure that all centres are minimally readable to anyone lit erate in their use — that is, to almost if not quite everybody in the Western suburban culture I'm concerne d with here. This 'readability' may be minimal indeed: many centres operate a strategy of alternating surpr ise and confusion with familiarity and harmony; and in different parts of any one centre, clarity and opacity will occur in different degrees of intensity for different 'users'. To a newcomer, for example, the major sup ermarket in an unfamiliar centre is usually more difficult to read than the spatial relations between the spe ciality food shops and the boutiques. Nevertheless, there are always some basic rules of contiguity and a ssociation at work to assist you to make a selection (of shops, as well as products).
However, I am more interested in a study that differentiates particular shopping centres. Differentiating sh opping centres means, among other things, looking at how particular centres produce and maintain what t he architectural writer Neville Quarry calls (in an appreciation of one particular effort) 'a unique sense of pl ace' - in other terms, a myth of identity. I see this as a 'feminist' project because it requires the predication of a more complex and localized affective relation to shopping spaces (and to the links between those sp aces and other sites of domestic and familial labour) than does the scenario of the cruising grammarian re ading similarity from place to place. In one way, all shoppers may be cruising grammarians. I do not need to deny this, however, in order to choose to concentrate instead on the ways that particular centres strive to become 'special', for better or for worse, in the everyday lives of women in local communities. Men, of c ourse, may have this relation to a shopping centre, too. So my 'feminism' at this stage is defined in non-p olemical and non-exclusive (that is, non-self-identical) terms.
Obviously, shopping centres produce a sense of place for economic, 'come-hither' reasons, and sometim es because the architects and planners involved may be committed, these days, to an aesthetics or even a politics of the local. But we cannot derive commentary on their function, people's responses to them, or their own cultural production of 'place' in and around them, from this economic rationale. Besides, shoppi ng-centre identities aren't fixed, consistent or permanent. Shopping centres do get facelifts, and change t heir image — increasingly so as the great classic structures in any region begin to age, fade and date.
But the cost of renovating them (especially the larger ones) means that the identity effect produced by an y one centre's spatial play in time is not only complex, highly nuanced and variable in detail, but also simp le, massive and relatively enduring overall, and over time, in space. At every possible 'level' of analysis — and there are very many indeed with such a complex, continuous social event

— shopping centres are overwhelmingly and constitutively paradoxical. This is one of the things that mak es it very hard to differentiate them. On the one hand, they seem so monolithically present — solid, monu mental, rigidly and indisputably on the landscape, and in our lives. On the other hand, when you try to dis pute with them, they dissolve at any one point into a fluidity and indeterminacy that might suit any philoso pher's delirium of an abstract femininity — partly because the shop
ping centre 'experience' at any one point includes the experience of crowds of people (or of their relative absence), and so of all the varied responses and uses that the centre provokes and contains.
To complicate matters, this dual quality is very much a part of shopping-centre strategies of appeal, their ' seductiveness', and also of their management of change. The stirring tension between the massive stabili ty of the structure, and the continually shifting, ceaseless spectacle within and around the 'centre', is one of the things that people who like shopping centres really love about shopping centres. At the same time, shopping-centre management methods (and contracts) are very much directed towards organizing and un ifying — at the level of administrative control, if not of achieved aesthetic effect — as much of this spectac le as possible by regulating tenant mix, signing and advertising styles, common space decor, festivities, a nd so on. This does not mean, however, that they succeed in 'managing' either the total spectacle (which includes what people do with what they provide) or the responses it provokes (and may include).

So the task of analysing shopping centres partly involves on the one hand exploring common sensations, perceptions and emotional states aroused by them (which can be negative, of course, as well as delirious), and on the other hand, battling against those perceptions and states in order to make a place from whic h to speak other than that of the fascinated describer — either standing 'outside' the spectacle qua ethno grapher, or (in a pose which seems to me to amount to much the same thing) ostentatiously absorbed in her own absorption in it, qua celebrant of 'popular culture'.

If the former mode of description may be found in much sociology of consumerism, or 'leisure', the latter mode is the more common today in cultural studies — and it has its persuasive defenders. Iain Chambers , for example, has argued strongly that to appreciate the democratic 'potential' of the way that people live through (not 'alongside') culture — appropriating and transforming everyday life — we must first pursue th e 'wide-eyed presentation of actualities' that Adorno disapproved of in some of Benjamin's work on Baude laire. It's difficult to disagree with this as a general orientation, and I don't. But if we look more closely at th e terms of Adorno's objection (and leave aside here the vexed question of its pertinence to Benjamin's wo rk), it's possible to read in them now a description of shopping-centre mystique: 'your study is located at t he crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched.' With a confidence that feminist philosoph ers have taught us to question, Adorno continues that 'Only theory could break the spell . . .' (although in context, he means Benjamin's own theoretical practice, not a force of theory-in-general).

In my view, neither a strategy of 'wide-eyed presentation' nor a faith in theory as the exorcist is adequate t o dealing with the critical problems posed by feminism in the analysis of 'everyday life'. If we locate our o wn study at that 'crossroads

of magic and positivism' to be found in the grand central court of any large regional mall, then social exper iences more complex than wide-eyed bewitchment are certain to occur — and to elicit, for a feminist, a m ore critical response than 'presentation' requires. If it is today fairly easy to reject the rationalist and gyno- phobic prejudice implied by Adorno's scenario (theory breaking the witch's spell), and if it is also easy to r efuse the old critiques of 'consumption' as false consciousness (bewitchment by the mall), then it is perha ps not so easy at the moment also to question the 'wide-eyed' pose of critical amazement at the performa nce of the everyday.

There's a great deal to be said about that, but my one point here must be that at the very least, a feminist analysis of shopping centres will insist initially upon ambivalence about its objects rather than a simple ast onishment 'before' them. Ambivalence allows a thinking of relations between contradictory states: it is als o a 'pose', no doubt, but one that is probably more appropriate to an everyday practice of using the same shopping centres often, for different reasons (rather than visiting several occasionally, just in order to see the sights). Above all, it does not eliminate the moment of everyday discontent — of anger, frustration, sor row, irritation, hatred, boredom, fatigue. Feminism is minimally a movement of discontent with 'the everyd ay' and with wide-eyed definitions of the everyday as 'the way things are'. While feminism too may procee d by 'staring hard at the realities of the contemporary world we all inhabit', as Chambers puts it, feminism also allows the possibility of rejecting what we see and refusing to take it as 'given'. Like effective shoppin g, feminist criticism includes moments of sharpened focus, narrowed gaze — of sceptical, if not paranoid, assessment. (This is a more polemical sense in which I shall consider this project to be 'feminist' in the co ntext of cultural studies.)

Recent feminist theory in a number of academic domains has provided a great many tools for any critical study of myths of identity and difference, and the rhetoric of 'place' in everyday life. But in using them in s hopping centres, I strike another difficulty: a rhetorical one this time, with resonances of interdisciplinary c onflict. It's the difficulty of what can seem to be a lack, or lapse, of appropriateness between my discourse as feminist intellectual and my objects of study.

To put it bluntly: isn't there something really 'off about mobilizing the weapons (and I use that violent meta phor deliberately) of an elite, possibly still fashionable but definitively unpopular theoretical discourse agai nst a major element in the lived culture of 'ordinary women' to whom that discourse might be as irrelevant as a stray copy of a book by Roland Barthes chosen to decorate a simulated yuppie apartment on display at Canberra's Freedom furniture showroom? And wouldn't using that discourse, and its weapons, be 'off i n a way that it isn't off to use them to re-read Gertrude Stein, or other women modernists, or indeed to re write devalued and non-modemist writings by women so that they may be used to revise existing concept s of the literary canon?

Of course, these are not questions that any academic, even feminist, is obliged to ask or to answer. One can simply define one's 'object' strategically, in the limited way most appropriate to a determined disciplin ary, and institutional, context. They are also questions that it's impossible to answer without challenging

their terms — by pointing out, for example, that a politics of 'relevance', and appropriateness (in so far as i t can be calculated at all) depends as much on the 'from where' and the 'to whom' of any discourse as it d oes on its relations to an 'about'. For example, the reason that 1 referred to 'interdisciplinary conflict' abov e is that during my research, I have found the pertinence or even the 'good taste' of using a theoretical vo cabulary derived from semiotics to discuss 'ordinary women's lives' questioned more severely by sociolog ists or historians (for whom the question becomes more urgent, perhaps, as so-called 'theory' becomes m ore respectable) than by non-academic (I do not say 'ordinary') women - who have been variously curious , indifferent or amused.

Nevertheless, these are questions that feminist intellectuals do ask each other; and we will no doubt conti nue to do so as long as we retain some sense of a wider social (as well as 'interdisciplinary') context and political import for our work. So I want to suggest the beginnings of an answer, one 'appropriate' to a cros s-disciplinary gathering of feminist intellectuals, by questioning the function of the 'ordinary woman' as a fi gure in our polemics. As a feminist, I cannot and do not wish the image, or the reality, of other women aw ay. As a semiotician, however, I must notice that 'images' of other women, even those which I've just con structed in mentioning 'them' as problem ('sociologists and historians' for me, rather than 'ordinary women ') are, in fact, images.

My difficulty in the shopping-centre project will thus be not simply my relation as intellectual to the culture I 'm speaking 'about', but to whom I will imagine that I will be speaking. So if, in a first instance, the task of differentiating shopping centres involves a struggle with fascinated description — consuming and consum erist list-making, attempts to freeze and fix a spectacular reality — my second problem will be to produce a mode of address that will 'evade' the fascinated or mirroring relationship to both the institutional discour ses 'about' women that I'm contesting, and the imaginary figure of Everywoman that those discourses — along with many feminist arguments — keep on throwing up.

that argument

than 'ordinary') women. I slid from restating the now conventional case that an image of a woman shoppin g is not a 'real' (or really representative) woman shopping to talking as though that difference absolved m e from thinking about other women's ideas about their experience in shopping centres, as 'users' and as workers there. This is a problem of method, to which I'd like to return. First, I want to make a detour to con sider the second enquiry I've had from 'other' women: 'What's the point of differentiating shopping centres ? So what if they're not all the same?'

Here I want to make two points, about method. The first is that if this project on 'Things to do with shoppin g centres' could have a subtitle, it would be 'Pedestrian notes on modernity'. I agree with Alice Jardine's a rgument in her book Gynesis that feminist criticism has much to gain from studying recent debates about ' modernity' in thought (that is, 'modernity' in the general European sense of life after industrialization — a sense which includes but is broader than the American aesthetic term 'postmodernity').

Studying shopping centres should be (like studying women modernists) one way to contest the idea that y ou can find, for example, at moments in the work

, I also evaded the problem of 'other' (rather

However in making

of Julia Kristeva, that the cultural production of 'actual women' has historically fallen short of a modernity understood as, or in terms derived from, the critical construction of modernism. In this project, I prefer to s tudy instead the everyday, the so-called banal, the supposedly un- or non-experimental, asking not, 'why does it fall short of modernism?' but 'how do classical theories of modernism fall short of women's modern ity?'

Second, the figure of the pedestrian gives me a way of imaging a critical method for analysing shopping c entres that doesn't succumb unequivocally to the lure of using the classical images of the Imaginary, in th e psychoanalytic sense, as a mirror to the shopping-town spectacle. Such images are very common now i n the literature about shopping centres: especially about big, enclosed, enveloping, 'spectacular' centres li ke one of those I'm studying, Indooroopilly Shoppingtown. Like department stores before them (and which they now usually contain), they are described as palaces of dreams, halls of mirrors, galleries of illusion .

. . and the fascinated analyst becomes identified as a theatre critic, reviewing the spectacle, herself in the spectacle, and the spectacle in herself. This rhetoric is closely related, of course, to the vision of shopping town as Eden, or paradise: the shopping centre is figured as, if not exactly utopian, then a mirror to utopia n desire, the desire of fallen creatures nostalgic for the primal garden, yet aware that their paradise is now an illusion.

The pedestrian, or the woman walker, doesn't escape this dreamy ambivalence. Indeed, sociological studi es suggest that women who don't come in cars to shopping centres spend much more time in them than t hose that do. The slow, evaluative, appreciatively critical relation is not enjoyed to the same extent by wo men who hit the car park, grab the goods, and head on out as fast as possible. Obviously, different wome n do both at different times. But if walking around for a long time in one centre creates engagement with a nd absorption in the spectacle, then one sure way at least to begin from a sharply defined sense of critical estrangement is to arrive at a drive-in centre on foot — and have to find a way to walk in. (Most women n on-drivers, of course, don't arrive on foot — especially with children — but by public transport: which can, in Australia, produce an acutely estranging effect.)

I have to insert a qualification here about the danger of constructing exemplary allegorical figures (even th at of the 'woman walker') if they're taken to refer to some model of the 'empirical social user' of shopping centres. It's a fairly futile exercise to try to make generalizations, beyond statistical averaging, about the u sers of shopping centres at any particular time — even in terms of class, race, age or gender. It's true that where you find a centre in a socially homogenized area (very common in some suburban regions of most Australian cities), you do find a high incidence of regular use by specific social groups (which may contrib ute strongly to the centre's identity effect). At a lot of centres, nevertheless, that's not the case. And even where it is, such generalizations remain abstractions, for concrete reasons: cars, public transport, visiting and tourist practices (since shopping centres can be used for sightseeing), and day-out patterns of move ment, all mean that centres do not automatically 'reflect' the composition of their immediate social environ ment. Also, there are different practices of use in one centre on any one day: some people may be there f or the one and only time in their

lives; there are occasional users choosing that centre rather than this on that day for particular, or quite ar bitrary, reasons; people may shop at one centre and go to another to socialize or hang around. The use o f centres as meeting places (and sometimes for free warmth and shelter) by young people, pensioners, th e unemployed and the homeless is a familiar part of their social function — often planned for, now, by cen tre management (distribution of benches, video games, security guards). And many of a centre's habitual users may not always live in its vicinity.

Shopping centres illustrate very well, I think, the argument that you can't treat a public at a cultural event as directly expressive of social groups and classes, or their supposed sensibility. Publics aren't stable, ho mogeneous entities — and polemical claims assuming that they are tell us little beyond the display of polit ical position and identification being made by the speaker. These displays may be interesting in themselv es, but they don't necessarily say much about the wider social realities such polemics often invoke.

Shopping-centre designers know this very well, in fact — and some recent retailing theory talks quite expli citly about the marketing need to break down the old standardized predication of a 'vast monolithic middle -class market' for shopping-centre product that characterized the strategy of the 1970s. The prevailing ma rketing philosophy for the 1980s (especially in the United States, but visible also in parts of Australia) has been rather to develop spectacles of 'diversity and market segmentation'. That is, to produce images of cl ass, ethnic, age and gender differentiation in particular centres — not because a Vietnamized centre, for example, would better 'express' the target culture and better serve Vietnamese (though it may well do so, particularly since retail theorists seem to have pinched the idea partly from the forms of community politic s), but because the display of difference will today increase a centre's 'tourist' appeal to everyone else fro m elsewhere.

This is a response, of course, to the disintegration of the postwar 'middle class', and the ever-growing dis parity in the developed nations between rich and poor. This change is quite menacing to the suburban sh opping centres, however structurally complicit the companies that profit from them may have been in brin ging the change about; and what's interesting is the attempt to 'manage' the change in terms of a different ial thematization of 'shoppers' — and thus of the centres to serve them. Three years ago, one theorist ima gined the future thus: 'Centres will be designed specifically to meet demands of the economic shopper, th e recreational shopper, or the pragmatic shopper, and so on.' His scenario is already being realized, altho

ugh once again this does not mean that as ‘shoppers’ we do in fact conform to, let alone become, the prof fered image of our ‘demands’.
That said, I want to make one more point about pedestrian leisureliness and critical time. One thing that it’ s important to do with particular centres is to write them a (differential) history. This can be surprisingly diff icult and time-consuming. The shopping centre ‘form’ itself — a form often described as ‘one of the few ne w building types created in our time’ — certainly has had its histories written, mostly in heroic and expansi ve terms. But I’ve found empirically that while some local residents are able to tell stories of a particular d evelopment and its effects on their lives, the people who manage centres in Australia are often disconcert ed at the suggestion that their centre could have a history. There are several obvious reasons for that — s hort-term employment patterns, employee and even managerial

indifference to the workplace, ideologies about what counts as proper history, the consecration of shoppin g centres to the perpetual present of consumption (‘nowness’), suspicion of ‘media enquiries’ (that is, of m e) in centres hostile to publicity they don’t control, and also the feeling that in many cases, the history is b est forgotten. For example, the building of Indooroopilly Shoppingtown required the blitzing of a huge chu nk of old residential Indooroopilly.
But there’s a parallel avoidance of local shopping-centre histories in much of the critical writing on centres — except for those which (like Southdale Mall or Faneuil Hall Marketplace in the United States, and Rose lands in Australia) figure as pioneers in the history of development. Leaving aside for the moment the mat erial produced by commercial interests (which tends to be dominated, as one might expect, by complex e conomic and futuristic speculation developed, in relation to particular centres, along interventionist lines), I ’d argue that an odd gap usually appears between, on the one hand, critical writing where the shopping pl ace becomes the metaphorical site for a practice of personal reminiscence (autobiography, the production of a written self), and, on the other, the purely formal description of existing structures found in architectur al criticism. Walter Benjamin’s A Berlin Chronicle (for older market forms) and Donald Home’s memoir of t he site of Miranda Fair in Money Made Us are examples of the first practice, and the article by Neville Qu arry that I’ve mentioned an example of the second.
The gap between these two genres (reminiscence and formal description) may in turn correspond to one produced by so-called ‘Man-Environment’ studies. For example, Amos Rapoport’s influential book The Me aning of the Built Environment depends entirely on the humanist distinction between ‘users’ meanings’ (th e personal) and ‘designers’ meanings’ (the professional). I think that a feminist study of shopping centres should occupy this user/designer, memory/aesthetics gap, not, of course, to ‘close’ or to ‘bridge’ it, but to dislocate the relationship between the poles that create it, and so dissolve their imaginary autonomy. Of c ourse, any vaguely anti-humanist critique would want to say as much. What is of particular interest to me as a feminist is to make relations between on the one hand those competing practices of ‘place’ (which Mi chel de Certeau calls ‘spatial stories’) that by investing sites with meaning make them sites of social confli ct, and on the other, women’s discourses of memory and local history.
A shopping centre is a ‘place’ combining an extreme project of general ‘planning’ competence (efforts at t otal unification, total management) with an intense degree of aberrance and diversity in local performance . It is also a ‘place’ consecrated to timelessness and stasis (no clocks, perfect weather . . .) yet lived and c elebrated, lived and loathed, in intimately historic terms: for some, as ruptural event (catastrophic or Edeni c) in the social experience of a community, for others, as the enduring scene (as the cinema once was, an d the home still may be) of all the changes, fluctuations and repetitions of the passing of everyday life. For both of these reasons, a shopping centre seems to me to be a good place to begin to consider women’s ‘ cultural production’ of modernity.
This is also why I suggested that it can be important to write a history of particular shopping centres. It is one way in which the clash of conflicting programmes for the management of change, and for resisting, re fusing or evading ‘management’, can better be understood.

Such a history can be useful in other ways. It helps to denaturalize the myths of spectacular identity-in-pla ce that centres produce in order to compete with each other, by analysing how these myths, those specta cles, are constructed for particular spaces over time. The qualification ‘particular’ is crucial, I think, becaus e like many critics now I have my doubts that polemical demonstrations of the fact that such ‘myth-making ’ takes place have much to offer a contemporary cultural politics. Like revelations of essentialism or, indee d, ‘naturalism’ in other people’s arguments, simple demythologization all too often retrieves, at the end of t

he process, its own untransformed basic premises now masked as surprising conclusions. 1 also think th at the project itself is anachronistic: commercial culture today proclaims and advertises, rather than ‘natur alizes’, its powers of artifice, myth invention, simulation. In researching the history of myth-making in a par ticular place, however, one is obliged to consider how it works in concrete social circumstances that inflec t, in turn, its workings — and one is obliged to learn from that place, make discoveries, change the drift of one’s analysis, rather than use it as a site of theoretical self-justification.

Second such a history must assume that centres and their myths are actively transformed by their ‘users’ (although in very ambiguous ways) and that the history itself would count as one such transformation by a user. In my study this will mean, in practice, that I’m going to analyse only shopping centres that I know p ersonally.

I’m not going to use them to tell my fife story, but I am going to refuse the discursive position of externaliz ed visitor/observer, or ethnographer/celebrant, by setting up as my objects only those centres where I hav e, or have had, some practice other than that of analyst — places I’ve lived near or used as consumer, wi ndow-shopper, tourist, or as escapee from a passing mood (since refuge, or R&R, is one of the social fun ctions of shopping centres, though women who just hate them may find that hard to accept). As the sociol ogist John Carroll reports with the cheerfulness of the true conservative, ‘The Promotions Manager of one of the Shopping World chains in Australia has speculated that these centres may replace Valium.’ Carroll doesn’t add anything about their role in creating needs for Valium, or in selling it, but only if you combine all three functions do you get a sense, I think, of Shopping World’s lived ambiguity.

And here I return to the question of ‘other women’ and my relation to their relation to these shopping centr es. I’ve argued quite clearly, I hope, my objections in the present context to procedures of sampling ‘repre sentative’ shoppers, framing exemplary figures, targeting empirical ‘user groups’, and so on. That doesn’t mean that I think there’s anything ‘wrong’ with those methods, that I wouldn’t use them in another context or borrow, in this context, from studies which have used them. Nor does it mean that I think there’s no wa y to produce knowledge of shopping centres except from ‘personal experience’ (which would preclude me , for example, from considering what it’s like to work in one for years).

However I’m interested in something a little more fugitive — or pedestrian — than either a professionally b ased informatics, or a narcissistically enclosed reverie, can give me. I’m interested in impromptu shopping -centre encounters: chit-chat, with women I meet in and around and because of these centres that I know personally (ranging from close family friends at some to total strangers at others).

Collecting chit-chat in situ is, of course, a pedestrian professional practice (‘journalism’). But I also want to analyse it in terms of the theoretical concerns I’ve outlined (rather than as ‘evidence’ of how others really feel) as a means of doubting and revising, rather than confirming, my own ‘planning’ programme.

In order to pass on to a few comments about one shopping centre ‘history’, I’d like first to describe the set of three to which it belongs in my project. I chose this set initially for quite personal reasons: three favourit e shopping centres, one of which my family used, and two of which I had often used as a tourist; two of w hich I loved, and one of which I hated. But I discovered subsequently that this ‘set’ also conforms to a syst em of formal distinctions conventionally used by the people who build and manage shopping centres. The se are planners’ terms, ‘designers’ meanings’ . But most of us are familiar in practice with these distinctio ns, and some whole cities (like Canberra) are built around them.

Until recently, there has been a more or less universally accepted classification system based on three m ain types of centre: the ‘neighbourhood’ centre, the ‘community’ centre, and the ‘regional’ centre. Some w riters add extra categories, like the ‘super-regional’, a huge and now mostly uneconomic dinosaur (rare in Australia, but common in more populous countries) with four to six full-line department stores. With the ag eing of the classic suburban form and the burgeoning of rival retail formats better adapted to current econ omic conditions (discount chains, hypermarkets, neo-arcades, ethnic and other ‘theme’ environments, hist ory-zones, speciality malls,

multi-use centres and urban megastructures), the basic schema is losing some of its reality-productive po wer. But it remains operative (and, in Australia, dominant) for those classic and still active structures of su burban life that I’m discussing.

The basic triad — neighbourhood/community/regional — is defined not in terms of catchment-area size, o r type of public attracted, or acreage occupied. It depends instead on the type of major store that a centre offers to ‘anchor’ its speciality shops. (As an anchor, it is usually placed at the end of the central strip.) Nei ghbourhood stores have only a supermarket, while community centres have a supermarket and either a di

scount house or a chain store (Big W, Target). Regional centres have both of these, plus at least one full department store. The anchor store is also called the magnet: it is considered to regulate the flows of attra ction, circulation and expulsion of people, commodities and cars.
For example, Indooroopilly Shoppingtown in Brisbane is a canonical example of the classical postwar regi onal shopping centre. It's also an aristocrat — a 'Westfield'. As Australia's leading shopping-centre develo per, now achieving the ultimate goal of operating in the United States and buying into the movie business, Westfield celebrates its own norm-setting status in an art corridor at Sydney's Miranda Fair, where you c an visit glorious full-colour photographs of all the other major Westfields in Australia, including Indooroopill y. Indooroopilly Shoppingtown itself is a place with a postcard — a site unto itself from which people can s tate their whereabouts in writing. It's an instance of the model form celebrated in the general histories I m entioned above. These are expansionist histories of postwar centrifugal movements of cars and people a way from old city centres — because of urban congestion in American and Australian cases, and congesti on or war damage or both in European towns and cities.

Ideally these centres, according to the histories, are so-called 'greenfield' developments on the edge of or outside towns — on that ever-receding transformation zone where the country becomes the city as subur bia. Of course, they have often in fact been the product of suburb-blitzing, not suburb-creating processes — though the blitzing of one may help to create another on the city's periphery. So strong has been the fo rce of the centrifugal imaginary, however, that in the case of the Brisbane Courier-Mail's coverage of the b uilding of Indooroopilly Shoppingtown, the houses being moved to make way for it were represented as fly ing off happily like pioneers out to the far frontiers of the city. The postwar regional centre, then, is traditio nally represented as the 'revolutionary', explosive suburban form.
At the opposite end of the spectrum, Fortitude Valley Plaza, again in Brisbane, is an example of a neighb ourhood centre. The term 'neighbourhood' may conjure up cosy, friendly images of intimacy, but this centr e is actually at a major urban transit point, over a railway station, in a high density area and on one of the most polluted roads in Australia. It's also an early example neither of greenfield nor blitzing development, but of the recently very popular practice of 'infill' (or 'twilight zone') development. 'Infill' has been filling in t he central shopping districts of many country towns and old suburbs over the past few years. It means tha t bits of shopping centre and arcade snake around to swallow the gaps between existing structures. This practice has been important in the downtown revivals that succeeded (along with the energy crisis) the he roic age of the regional shopping centre.
Again, the Courier-Mail's coverage was metaphorically apt. Because there had been an old open railway l ine on the site, the Valley Plaza was seen to be resourcefully filling in the 'previous useless airspace' wast ed by the earlier structure. It was promoted as a thrifty, perhaps even ecologically sound, solution to a pro blem of resources. The Valley Plaza is also an example of a centre that has undergone an identity chang e. When I first studied it in 1983, it was a bit dank and dated — vintage pop futurist in style, with plenty of original but pollution-blackened 1960s orange and once-zappy geometrical trimmings. Now it's light green , and Chinatownified (with Chinese characters replacing the op-art effects), to blend in with the ethnic rep ackaging of Fortitude Valley as a whole.
Finally, Green Hills is an example of the mediating category, a 'community' centre in East Maitland, a tow n near the industrial city of Newcastle in New South Wales. It's a Woolworths centre, with a supermarket and a Big W Discount House. Unlike the other two it is a mostly open mall. It's badly signed and bordered, and in fact it's mostly hidden from view' in relation to the major highway (the New England) that runs right alongside. Whatever the original considerations and/or accidents behind this design, its effect now is in fa ct a very appropriate paranoid country town, insiders-only identity. Like much country town cultural produc tion, you have to know where it is to find it.
Yet it was, for many years, very successful. Generically a community centre,
W Discount magnet
pulling in people from all over the Hunter Valley who might once have gone on through to Newcastle. Peo ple didn't just come to Maitland — they went to Green Hills. So if, in this particular triad, Indooroopilly is ex plosive and the Valley Plaza is thrifty in the local rhetorics of space, Green Hills was represented in terms it has none the less had a regional function — with its Big

of a go-ahead conservatism extending and renewing the old town of Maitland, while acting to help maintai n the town's traditional economic and cultural Independence.

I want to examine the representation of Green Hills in more detail, and one reason for looking at the triad of formal distinctions has been to provide a context for doing so. In the short history of Green Hills that I've been able to construct, it's clear that allusions to the other shopping-centre forms, and especially to the suburban-explosive model, played a very complex role first in Woolworths' Strategic presentation of the project to build Green Hills, and second, once it was built, in the promotional rhetoric used to specify an ideal public to whom the centre would appeal (something like 'the loyal citizens' of Maitland).

In presenting a couple of elements of that history now, I must make two strong qualifications about what sort of history it is (in the context of this paper), and why. First, it is primarily derived from coverage in the local newspaper, the Mailland Mercury. Other sources generate other stories. This version is specifically concerned with the rhetorical collusion between the local media and the interests of Woolworths; and also with the ways that this relationship cut across two preexisting but at this point contradictory collusions of interest between the media and the council on the one hand, and the media and local small business interests on the other. (Small business, of course, was understandably most alarmed about the prospect of the Green Hills development.) Close relations between these parties - council, media, small business are very common in nearly all country newspapers now, which tend to define the town's interests very much in terms of the doings of civic fathers on the one hand, and those of local enterprise on the other. Sport and the cycle of family life are two major sites on which those doings are played out. In that sense, country newspapers are unashamedly one long advertorial. But in the building of Green Hills, civic fathers and local business were opposed in a conflict that took the form of a debate about the meaning of 'local community'. To describe this conflict briefly, I shall give it the form of an over-coherent, paranoid story.

Second, as my choice of sources suggests, this version could be criticized as lopsidedly restricted to 'designers' meanings', planners' programmes. 1 don't mind too much about that, for two reasons. One is that, as a long-term if irregular 'user' of Green Hills, 1 was more interested in pursuing what I didn't already know about it, or hadn't noticed when it was happening. This 'place' had simply appeared where once there had been a border zone that in the 1960s had signified the joys of driving out of town and the ambivalence of returning, and was, in earlier decades, the field of the illicit outside town (the forbidden picnic-ground).

The other reason is that I actually have no clear idea of what follows from the espousal of an emphasis on 'users' meanings' (or as anti-humanists might say, 'practices of consumption') except, perhaps, for more celebrant sociology, and/or a reinvigorated local history.

Part of the problem, perhaps, is the common substitution between 'users' meanings' and 'practices of consumption'. It's an easy slide: from user to consumer to consumption, from persons to structures and processes. A whole essay could be written about what's wrong with making this and the parallel slide from notions

of individual and group 'creativity' to cultural 'production' to political 'resistance' — which can lead to the kind of criticism that a friend once parodied as 'the discovery that washing your car on Sunday is a revolutionary event'.

All I want to say here is that if the production/consumption opposition is not just a 'designer/user' relation writ large (because relations of production cannot be trivialized to 'people planning things'), then it doesn't follow that representations of a shopping-centre design project circulated by local media and consumed (creatively or otherwise) by some of its readership can be slotted away as production history. Indeed, I'm not sure that media practices can usefully be 'placed' on either 'side' of such a dichotomy. I think that the dichotomy itself needs to be reexamined, especially since it now floats free of its old anchorage in theories of social totality; and the assumption that production and consumption can be read somehow as parallel or diverging realities depends on another assumption (becoming more dubious with every chip of change in technology) that we know enough now about production and can move to the other side. As though production, somehow, stays put.

The story of Green Hills is in a way an allegory about a politics of staying put, and it begins, paranoiacally, not with the first obvious appearance of a sign staking out a site, but behind the scenes — with an article in the NSW State Planning Authority journal SPAN in January 1969 and a report about it published in the Newcastle Morning Herald (24 January 1969). The Herald's story' had the provocative title 'Will Maitland retain its entity or become a Newcastle suburb?'

Several general problems were facing Maitland, and many other country towns in Eastern Australia, at this time: population drift, shrinking local employment prospects, declining or anachronistic community facilities, the 'nothing to do' syndrome. Maitland also had regional problems as a former rural service centre an

d coalfields capital en route to becoming a dormitory suburb, menaced by residential creep towards Newc astle — then about twenty miles away and getting closer. Maitland in particular suffered as well from phys ical fragmentation after ruinous floods in 1949 and 1955. The 1955 flood devastated the old commercial c entre and the inner residential area: houses were shifted out and away in response to a 'natural' blitzing.
So the threat of suburbanization and annexation uttered by the Herald produced an outraged response in that afternoon's Maitland Mercury from the Maitland mayor who, in spurning these 'dismal prophecies', m entioned the 'hope' that Woolworths would soon name the day for a development at East Maitland. From t his moment on, and during all the conflicts that followed, Woolworths never figured in the council discours e as a national chain just setting up a store in a likely spot, but as a gallant and caring saviour come to ma ke Maitland whole again — to stop the gap, to restore definition, to contain the creeping and seeping and to save Our Town's 'Entity'. In actual fact, of course, and following a well-known law of development, Gre en Hills was built on the town fringe nearest Newcastle, and the ensuing growth around it took the town kil ometres closer to Newcastle and helped to fragment further the old city centre.
Four months after the SPAN and Herald incidents, the Mercury published a photo saying
of an anonymous man staring at a mystery sign behind wire in the bush,

'This site has been selected for another all Australian development by Woolworths' (Maitland Mercury, 16 May 1969). The site was at that time still a ragged border wasteland, across the hill from a notorious old 's lum' called Eastville. The Mercury photo initiated a long-running mystery story about the conversion of the indefinite bush-border into a 'site', the site into a place, the place into a suburb, in a process of territorializ ation that I'll call the fabrication of a place-name.
To summarize the episodes briefly: first, the mystery sign turned out to be not just a bait to initiate interest but a legal loophole that allowed Woolworths to claim, when challenged by local business firms, that it ha d fulfilled the terms of a 1965 agreement to develop the site by a certain date (Maitland Mercury, 25 June 1969). The sign itself could count as a developmental structure, and it had appeared just in time. Second, the first sign was replaced by another: a board at first adorned only by the letter 'G'. Maitland 'citizens' we re to participate in a guessing competition to find the name of the place, and a new letter was added each week until the full place-name, and the name of a lucky winner, emerged. This happened on 22 October 1969; and on the following Remembrance Bay, 11 November, the city council abolished the name of the s lum across the highway, Eastville. Eastville's name was to be forgotten, said the Mercury, in order to 'unif y the area with East Maitland' ('Eastville to go west', Maitland Mercury, 12 November 1969).
The basic Green Hills complex — at this stage a neighbourhood centre with a supermarket only — was o pened in February 1972. The ceremony included ritual displays of crowd hysteria, with frenzied women fai nting and making off with five thousand pairs of 8-cent pantyhose in the first five minutes (Maitland Mercur y, 10 February 1972). This rite of baptism, or of public consent to the place-name, was repeated even mor e fervently in November 1977 when the Big W Discount House was added to make Green Hills a commun ity centre. This time, women came wearing signs of Green Hills identity: said the Mercury, 'A sea of green mums flooded in. . . . The mums dressed in sea green, celery green, grass green, olive green, green flor als — every green imaginable — to take advantage of a 2NX offer of free dinner tickets for women dresse d in that colour' (Maitland Mercury, 14 November 1977).
That wasn't the end of it. The process now known as 'metro-nucleation' had begun. In 1972, a company a ssociated with Woolworths began a hundred-home subdivision behind the centre. The area then acquired more parking, a pub, a motel, light industry, an old people's home, more speciality shops at the centre its elf in 1980, and then, in 1983, a community health centre. This centre, said the Mercury — forgetting that the forgetting of Eastville had been to unify East Maitland — would serve 'to service people living in the B erefield, Maitland, Bolwarra, East Maitland and Green Hills areas' (Maitland Mercury, 14 November 1983) . Maitland's 'entity' at this stage was still a dubious mess, but Green Hills' identity was established, its stat us as a place-name secure. Presented rhetorically as a gesture of community unification, it had been, in e ffect, suburban-explosive in function.
The story continues, of course: I shan't follow it further, except to note that after this decade of expansion (a decade of acute economic distress for Maitland, and the Hunter Valley coal towns in general) Green Hil ls went into a certain

decline. Woolworths got into trouble nationally and their Big W .discount stores failed to keep pace with n

ewer retail styles. Green Hills in particular faced stiff competition when a few blocks of the old city centre were torn down for a Coles-Myer Super-K semi-hypermarket, and when rapid infill development brought t he twilight zone to town. Even residents hostile to these changes transferred their interest to them: one sa id, 'It's awesome how many places they think we can use just to buy our few pounds of mince.'

I want to conclude with a few general points about things to do with this story. First, there are obviously a number of standardized elements in it that would appear in any such story set anywhere. For example, oc eanic and hysterical crowd behaviour, in which the crowd itself becomes a decorative feature of the shopp ing centre's performance, is a traditional motif (and the Mercury in the late 1960s ran news features on ho w people behaved at shopping centres in Sydney and the United States). More generally, the process of development itself was impeccably normal.

Yet in looking at local instances of these general models, the well-known tilings that shopping centres do, one is also studying the practical inflections, or rewritings, of those models that can account for, and foun d, a regional politics. In the Green Hills case, I think that the Woolworths success story was written by the media very much in terms of a specific response to pre-existing discourses about Maitland's 'very own' pr oblems of identity and unity. In this sense, Woolworth's 'success' was precisely to efface the similarity bet ween what was happening in Maitland and what was going on elsewhere. That's the kind of problem I'd li ke to consider further: the ways in which the exploitation of the sense of 'difference' in contemporary cultu re can be quite as complex as, and necessarily related to, the construction and deconstruction of imaginar y identities.

Second, I'd like to use the Green Hills study to question some recent accounts in cultural studies of so-cal led 'commodity semiosis' — the processes whereby commodities become signs, and signs become com modities — and the tendency to feminize (for example, through a theme of seduction) the terms in which t hat semiosis is discussed.

In an interesting critique of the work of Jean Baudrillard, Andrew Wernick writes: 'The sales aim of commo dity semiosis is to differentiate the product as a valid, or at least resonant, social totem, and this would be impossible without being able to appeal to taken-for-granted systems of cultural reference' (Wernick 1987: 31).

While it is inappropriate (if consonant with marketspeak) simply to equate a whole shopping centre with 't he product' in Wernick's sense, I could say that, in the Green Hills case, Woolworths' strategy in selling th e centre to the town was to appeal to that taken-for-granted cultural reference system of 'booster' discour se deployed by ideologues of Australian country towns — towns which have long been losing their old rea sons for being, and so their sense of the meaning and aim of their 'history'. Donald Home has defined the elements of 'booster' discourse in Australia as, first, getting bigger and, second, making it last — aims whi ch we might rephrase in combination here as 'keeping it up'.

I can say practically nothing here about the inner workings of Green Hills: but one thing that a feminist criti que of commodity semiosis might notice there

Is that among the taken-for-granted cultural reference systems appealed to by suburban shopping centres is a garden furniture aesthetic that not only makes all centres seem the same, but, through a play of echo ing spatial analogy, makes shop-j ping centres seem like a range of other sites consecrated to the perfor mance of family life, to women's work in leisure: shopping-town, beer garden, picnic spot, : used-car yard (with bunting), scenic lookout, town garden, public park, suburban I backyard.

The brightly coloured benches of Green Hills — along with coloured rubbish cones, rustic borders, foliage, planters, mulch and well-spaced saplings — are all S direct descendants of what in 1960 Robin Boy calle d, in The Australian Ugliness, the 'desperately picturesque accoutrements' then just bursting out brightly a s 'features' at Australian beauty-spots. There's nothing desperate about their " picturesqueness now, alth ough they may mean desperation to some of their users (as well as cheer and comfort to others, especiall y those who remember the unforgiving discomforts of seatless, as well as featureless, Australian country t own ; streets). Today, I think, they work to produce a sense of 'setting' that defines an ! imaginary cohere nce of public space in Australia — or more precisely, of a 'lifestyle' space declaring the dissolution of bou ndaries between public and private space, between public domains of work and private spheres of leisure .

Janet Woolf has argued that the emergence of the distinction between public and private spheres in the ni neteenth century made impossible a female flaneur — a female strolling heroine 'botanizing on the asphal t' as Walter Benjamin put it in his study of Baudelaire (Woolf 1988). I want to argue that it is precisely the

proclaimed dissolution of public and private on the botanized asphalt of shoppingtown today that makes possible not a Jlaneuse, since that term becomes anachronistic, but a practice of modernity by women for which it is most important not to begin by identifying heroines and victims (even of conflicts with male paranoia), but a profound ambivalence about shifting roles.

Yet here again, I want to differentiate. At places 'like' Green Hills, the given function of hallucinatory spatial resemblance and recall is not, as it might be in an urban road-romance, a thinning out of significance through space so that one place ends up like any other in its drab indifference. Nor is it, as it might be in a big city, a move in a competitive game where one space says of its nearby rivals, 'We Do All the Same Things Better'. Green Hills appeals instead to a dream of plenitude and of a paradoxically absolute yet expansive self-sufficiency: a country town (if not 'male') paranoia seeking reassurance that nothing is lacking in this one spot. It's the motherland dream of staying home, staying put: and as an uncle said to me on a stray visit to Green Hills, made simply to be sociable, waving round at the mulch and the benches and the glass facade of Big W — 'Why go elsewhere when you've got it all here?' The centre itself, in his imagination, was not a fallen land of fragmented modernity, but the Garden of Eden itself. (Two years later, however, he sent me by myself to buy him cut-price T-shirts from Super-K in town — now the place where everyone wants to shop but no one cares to visit.)

Having arrived at last at the irresistible Big W magnet, I'd like to conclude with a comment on a text which seems to me to be a 'radical' culture-criticism equivalent of the Garden of Eden fable by Myer's John Lennen with which I began.

It's a passage from Terry Eagleton's book Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism-, and it is also, although obliquely, a parable of modernity that depends on figuring consumption as a seductively fallen state. Paraphrasing and developing Benjamin's study of the flaneur, Eagleton writes:

> the commodity disports itself with all comers without its halo slipping, promises permanent possession to everyone in the market without abandoning its secretive isolation. Serializing its consumers, it nevertheless makes intimate ad hominem address to each.
>
> (Eagleton 1981: 27)

Now if this is not, as in Lennen's paper, a figure of Adam comforting Eve with a note on the postmodern condition, it's certainly Adam comforting himself with a certain ambivalent fantasy about Eve. It's a luscious, self-seducingly risque fantasy that Adam has, a commodity thought, rather like the exquisite bottle of perfume or the pure wool jumper in the import shop, nestling deep in an upmarket neo-arcade, its ambience aglow with Miami Vice pastels or (since that's now been a little overdone) cooled by marbloid Italianate tiling.

But its pertinence to retailing, commodity semiosis, and shopping practices today is questionable not least because the development of forms like the neo-arcade (or the fantastically revamped prewar elegance of certain city department stores) is a response to the shopping-centre forms I've been discussing: a response which works by offering signs of old-fashioned commodity fetishism precisely because suburban shopping centres don't do so. Part of my argument has been that in suburban shopping practices it isn't necessarily or always the objects consumed that count in the act of consumption, but rather that unique sense of place. Beyond that, however, I think that the Benjamin—Eagleton style of boudoirtalk about commodities can be doubly misleading.

First, one might ask, what is the sound of an intimate ad hominem address from a raincoat at Big W? Where is the secretive isolation of the thongs in a pile at Super-K? The commodities in a discount house boast no halo, no aura. On the contrary, they promote a lived aesthetic of the serial, the machinic, the mass-reproduced: as one pair of thongs wears out, it is replaced by an identical pair, the same sweatshirt is bought in four different colours, or two different and two the same; a macrame planter defies all middle-class whole-earth naturalness connotations in its dyes of lurid chemical mustard and killer neon pink. Second, commodity boudoir-talk gathers up into the single and class-specific image of the elite courtesan a number of different relations women and men may invent both to actual commodities, the activity of combining them and, above all, to the changing discursive frames (like shopping centres) that invest the practices of buying, trafficking with and using commodities with their variable local meanings.

So one of the things I'd like to do with shopping centres is to make it more difficult for 'radical' culture critics to fall back quite so comfortably on the classic image of European bourgeois luxury to articulate theories of sexual and economic exchange. If I were, for the sake of argument, to make up a fable of Adam and Eve and the fall into modernity, I wouldn't have my image of Eve taking comfort from modernist explanation

(as she does from Lennen's Adam), and I wouldn't

have her flattering him as she does for Eagleton's 'comers'. I'd have an image of her as a pedestrian, laughing at both of them, walking on past saying, 'Boys, you sound just like the snake.'

But of course, that's not good enough. It's the Eden story that's the problem, the fable of the management of change that's wrong with its images of the garden, the snake, the couple, the Fall, and the terms that the story imposes, no I matter how or by whom it's rewritten. To deny that shopping centres, and K consumption, provide allegories of modernity as a fallen state is to claim that for g feminism, some stories may be beyond salvage.

A film about these matters (and about elite courtesans) shown at the Feminist f Criticism and Cultural Production Conference — Seduction — The Cruel Woman by K Elfi Mikesch and Monika Treut — interested me in its luxuriant difference from
an imaginary text I've often wanted to write about country town familial sadomasochism, called 'Maitland S&M'.

This text is about the orchestration of modes of domestic repetition, the going back again and again over the same stories, the same terrains, the same sore spots, which I think a centre like Green Hills has successfully incorporated and mobilized in its fabrication of a myth of staying put at home. In case this sounds like feminist paranoia about, once again, planners, designers and producers, 1 should stress that one of the things that is fascinating about Big W aesthetics is the way that the store provides little more than a set of managerial props for the performance of inventive scenarios in a drama that circulates endlessly between home and the pub and the car park and Green Hills and back again to home. One can emerge for a good session of ritualized pain and sorrow (as well as, of course, more pedestrian experiences) dressed in nothing more ferocious or costly than a fluffy pink top and a sweet floral skirt.

My main point, however, is that in so far as I have myself used the story of Green Hills as an allegory, it has been to argue that while it's clearly crucial, and fun, for feminist criticism to keep on rewriting the given stories of culture, to keep on revising and transforming their meanings, we must also remember that with some stories in some places, we do become cruelly bound by repetition, confined by the reiteration of the terms we're contesting. Otherwise, in an act of voluntary if painful servitude, feminist criticism ties its own hands and finds itself, again and again, at Green Hills, bound back home — to the same old story.